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Hokaido Beginning
Laid To

U. S. General
Horace Capron -
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HOKKAIDO BEGINNING LAID
TO U.S. GENERAL

Horace Capron, Grant's Secretary of
Agriculture, Brought to Japan to Assist

FORGOTTEN STORY TOLD

Livestock Expert Tells History of Early
Development of Big Northern Island

Deeply imbedded in the Hokkaido, the scene of the army maneuvers that ended recently, there is a little-known tale of early Japanese-American friendship. It concerns an American, whose intelligence, talent and spirit of friendship laid in virgin territory the sound foundations of a prosperous agricultural district, valuable to national existence.

Of Brigadier-General Horace Capron, veteran of the Civil War and once U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, popular knowledge probably does not exist. His story was narrated to a representative of The Japan Advertiser by Dr. Issa Tanimura, retired livestock expert, who, because of his own pursuits in the field of agriculture, has made Horace Capron one of his private studies.

Before the Hokkaido took its present name in November, 1869, the northern island was known as Yezo. Practically all of its inhabitants were Ainu. The district was never regarded officially as a part of Japan until in December, 1590, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the military ruler, received an unknown visitor by the name of Yoshihiro Takeda, who told him about the existence of an important island in the north. Hideyoshi heard about the place for the first time and thanked his visitor, entertaining him with an elaborate banquet and giving him the name of Matsumai and the title of Governor of Yezo. Later the Tokugawa Shogunate kept Yeso under its sway by sending governors to Hakodate, but during the period of its rule the district was important only for the fishing industry.

American Help Sought

The importance of developing the Hokkaido of Japan was realized at the time the island was given its present name. In 1870 the Hokkaido Development Bureau was created. But in developing that virgin territory, at that time only the range of the aboriginal Ainus, necessitated the help of experienced men. Count Kiyotaka Kuroda, who was vice-chief of the bureau, decided to seek the assistance of the United States for three reasons - because it was with that country that Japan first opened

diplomatic intercourse; because that country was largely agricultural and new developments in that field undoubtedly existed; and because it was not in alliance with Czarist Russia which Japan feared.

In November, 1870, Count Kuroda went to the United States, a country then low in the estimation of Japanese leaders, who sent their sons to school in England. In January of the following year he met President Ulysses S. Grant in Washington and reported the object of his mission. General Grant was a wise man, according to Dr. Tanimura, even a very honest man, because he warned that the man to be selected to direct the development project must not be just a farmer, but a soldier, because the Hokkaido is close to Russian territory. He also must be a man of good character and a man experienced in agricultural enterprises.

The man who was consulted by the American President was General Capron, his Secretary of Agriculture. At the Secretary's suggestion a conference of Washington leaders was held and for two weeks a general development plan was thoroughly considered. The man whom President Grant commissioned to head the project was General Capron.

On February 28, 1871, the Japanese Government appointed him High Commissioner for the Hokkaido with an annual compensation of \$10,000 more than the Y9,600 received

by the Premier. As the new currency system had not been established then, the amount was to be paid in gold "koban".

Sailed to Japan

Count Kuroda purchased two twin-screw boats in the United States, naming them Capron Maru and Combu Maru, and on these ships the Japanese mission and the American general with a staff of assistants came to Japan. The boats left San Francisco on August 1, 1871, and arrived in Yokohama 28 days later.

General Capron was received in Tokyo with a stirring welcome. As there were no hotels in those days he was given lodging in the Zojoji, the temple in Shiba Park, where the Emperor Meiji himself had stopped a few years before, preceding his entry into the present Imperial Palace. The American was honored by an Imperial audience at which time the Emperor Meiji tendered him a warm message wishing him every success in his work in the Hokkaido.

An office for the Hokkaido project was first established in Tokyo. It was to handle the various seeds, plants and livestock which were to come from the United States. As they would be hard to keep in the Hokkaido they were first acclimated in Tokyo at three government farms, one at the present site of the car barn in Aoyama,

one at the present site of the Aoyama Gakuen and one at the present site of the Red Cross Hospital.

Engineers Active

In advance of General Capron, Major Warfield, American army engineer and engineer for the Baltimore Ohio Railway, who was a member of the Capron staff, went to the Hokkaido to build roads. The general himself went the following year and his first work was the establishment of a meteorological observatory, the first to be established in Japan. Then his experts undertook soil analysis, built a road 40 feet wide from Hakodate to Sapporo, constructed bridges, railroad and a 14-mile canal from Tokachi to Sapporo.

Coal mines were exploited to make money to finance the development projects. Beans, Irish potatoes, beets, carrots and other vegetables were planted. One of the most successful agricultural experiments was with apples. General Capron went further by bringing in blooded cattle, horses, hogs and sheep. In Neechap he founded a horse breeding farm which today is known as the Imperial stud farm.

In Sapporo two large factories were built, one a saw mill and the other a flour mill, both operated by hydro-electric power, an innovation in Japan.

Under General Capron worked 44 American experts in various fields, 14 Chinese, five Russians, four Germans

and four British, and one each of French, Italian, Dutch and Swiss.

Period Eventful

Life was not by any means peaceful when General Capron was in Japan, for it was at a time when Japan had just begun its career as a modern nation. Political life was unsettled. Western knowledge was being sought. Men still wore swords and life was not too safe. The Saigo rebellion, following the refusal of Saigo's plan of annexing Korea, brought confusion into the already turbulent times.

General Capron was supposed to have stayed five years, but due to the great confusion of that period, he returned to the United States after his fourth year. Before he left he founded an Agricultural School in Sapporo and for one year put that institution into the hands of Dr. William H. Clarke, dean of the agricultural school of Amherst College. He also founded the first girls' school and the first women's normal school.

His leaving Japan by no means ended his work, for year after year new men with seasoned talents in various fields were sent to Japan, until the development project was officially closed in 1883. Among them were such men as Louis Boehmehr and Edwin Dun, who devoted their entire energies

to the development of the Hokkaido for a salary of Y120 per month. There was James Crawford, one of General Capron's engineers, who laid the Aomori-to-Ueno railroad.

Given Message

When the American General left Japan, he was given the Second Class Order of the Rising Sun and another Imperial Message in which at length the Emperor Meiji thanked him for the wonderful work he had done in the Hokkaido and wished him happiness in the days to come.

General Capron, a descendant of a family of great agriculturalists, was schooled at West Point. As a lieutenant he laid the cornerstone of the Washington Monument. On February 22, just 40 years after that cornerstone was laid, after attending the 40th anniversary of the event, General Capron passed away. At his funeral Mr. Ryuichi Kuki, Japanese Minister to Washington, was first pall bearer.

"It seems a shame," Dr. Tanimura concluded, "that in the Hokkaido to-day there is no monument to perpetuate the deeds of General Capron, to remind the people for all time that it was he who did the ground work for the Hokkaido's development as a fertile and prosperous agriculture district. The monument may be of little value in itself, but it will be of great value for what it stands."

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